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Maxwell-Mossad link: much more to reveal

By PHILLIP McCARTHY
Herald Correspondent

NEW YORK, Wednesday: Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Seymour Hersh – author of a controversial book that linked Robert Maxwell and Israeli intelligence – said last night only part of the relationship between the press baron and Israel's security agency, Mossad, was detailed in the book.

"I used about 10 per cent of what I collected," Mr Hersh said. "The libel laws in London are, from an American point of view, very strict, horrible, so it was prudent to collect a lot more information about Mr Maxwell than we chose to publish."

Mr Maxwell slapped Mr Hersh and his British publisher with libel writs after the book, *The Samson Option*, was published late last month. The book accused Mr Maxwell of helping the Israelis capture a defector who had revealed details of the country's nuclear program to the press.

The Samson Option was mainly about the development of Israel's nuclear program and dealt with Mr Hersh's portrayal of the Maxwell-Mossad connection only in passing.

In America, some of the book's other allegations – that the Israelis passed on sensitive American intelligence to the Soviets to curry favour with Moscow – have attracted more attention. The data passed along, the book says, included the locations of nuclear targets.

However, in Britain, where the book was published simultaneously, controversy centred on the long-standing connections Mr Hersh claimed existed between Mr Maxwell, the foreign editor of his London *Daily Mirror*, Mr Nicholas Davies, and Mossad.

How his papers reported his death.

Mr Hersh said Mr Davies had also spied for Israel and had been involved in an Israeli scheme to sell arms to Iran.

Mr Davies was sacked last week, although not because the *Mirror* said it accepted that the allegations were true. There was a discrepancy in his rebuttal in which he said he had never been in a part of the US which evidence later proved he had been.

Last night, asked whether he had more information about the Maxwell-Mossad connection, Mr Hersh said: "The direct answer is that I know more about those things than is in the book. The problem is I am also a journalist and I will have to decide when it is appropriate to release what I know."

Mr Hersh, one of America's most acclaimed investigative journalists, suggested that he and lawyers for the British publisher, Faber and Faber, had been planning to use the additional information in court.

"One of the issues we had to deal with was whether we were going to release the information in a trial resulting from his libel action against us – if, in fact, it ever got to trial," Mr Hersh said.

Now that Mr Maxwell is dead, his writ against Mr Hersh will not proceed.

Mr Hersh said he had no special knowledge about the circumstances of Mr Maxwell's death.

The key element of Mr Hersh's accusations against Mr Maxwell concerns an Israeli nuclear technician, Mordechai Vanunu, whom the Israelis seized and returned to solitary confinement in Israel after he revealed details of the country's nuclear program to London's *Sunday Times* in 1986.

"He initially went, alas for him, to the Mirror Group," Mr Hersh said last night. "And it was there that Maxwell intervened in a way that would be well below the standards of a responsible publisher. He had a knock-down story written and sent Vanunu's material to the Israeli Embassy."

When the material subsequently appeared in *The Sunday Times*, according to Mr Hersh, Mr Davies helped Mossad discover the hiding place of Mr Vanunu.

OBITUARY

(IAN) ROBERT MAXWELL
1923–1991

LONDON, Tuesday: Mr Robert Maxwell, who has died aged 68, was one of the most mercurial postwar operators not only in the British media but British commerce generally, a self-made individualist who managed – just – to keep a fitful peace with the mores of a British corporate scene notoriously unaccepting of flamboyant personalities.

His achievements were due to the essence of his assertive character forged in his early years. He was born on June 10, 1923, to peasant parents, Michael and Ann Hoch, in Slatinske Doly, a village in Czechoslovakia near the border of Romania. He always described himself as self-educated.

He fled his native country as a youth to escape Nazi persecution of the Jews. In an obscure period of his life, he acquired at least a smattering of several languages, went to Britain and joined the British Army.

He landed with his regiment on the beaches of Normandy shortly after the D-Day invasion of the continent. In January 1945, when the war was in its final months, he was on the Maas River in Holland with some other soldiers who charged a block of flats in an attempt to re-take them from the Germans. Mr Maxwell charged straight across the Germans' line of fire. Bullets pinged around him, but all missed. For this heroism he got his Military Cross.

His ambition, he reportedly told his wife, Elisabeth, otherwise known as Betty, whom he met in Paris and married in 1944, was to "make my fortune and get into Parliament". Within two decades, he had done both.

Mr Maxwell began building his vision as an Allied press officer in Berlin. He resigned from the army in 1947 and formed a partnership with the German publishing house Springer. Mr Maxwell arranged to distribute Springer's large inventory of scientific publications.

He called his business Pergamon Press. It was to be the cornerstone of his fortune. In 1949, Pergamon secured the exclusive rights in the West to publish Russian and Eastern European scientific journals.

Mr Maxwell ... ambition of building huge media empire.

In 1959, Mr Maxwell began his political career in earnest by being adopted Labour candidate for Buckingham. He won the seat when the Labour Government came to power in the 1964 general election and held it until 1970.

The defeat came during a particularly tough period that almost ruined Mr Maxwell. In 1969, he tried to sell Pergamon Press to New York financier Saul Steinberg. Steinberg accused him of inflating the value of the company and pulled out of the deal.

Government investigators declared that Mr Maxwell was "unfit for the stewardship" of a public company.

Mr Maxwell, however, had transferred control of Pergamon to a family-owned company and, by 1974, he had regained control of it. The turnaround earned him another nickname, "the Bouncing Czech".

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw Mr Maxwell cutting a new swathe through the British business world. He was always adept at trimming waste, slashing excess manpower and releasing locked-up assets.

However, Mr Maxwell's cardinal ambition had always been to become a national newspaper proprietor, and 16 years after his first stab at it (his abortive bid for the *News of the World*), he succeeded in purchasing Mirror Group Newspapers from Reed International on June 13, 1984.

This marked the beginning of the most fascinating period in Mr Maxwell's career, during which he was rarely out of the headlines.

He became another Fleet Street legend, notorious for his treatment of editors, journalists and print workers. He took America by stealth rather than by storm, acquiring the prestigious Macmillan Inc publishing business and the *Official Airlines Guide*, and later the New York *Daily News*.

His attempt to buy *The Age* newspaper in 1988 for $A805 million and a $A250 million bid to take a controlling stake in *The West Australian* newspaper last year were both thwarted.

> Mr Maxwell charged straight across the Germans' line of fire. Bullets pinged around him, but all missed.

Last year, he stepped up efforts to gain a toe-hold in Australia's $800 million-a-year magazine industry.

Mr Maxwell has operated in Australia since 1960 through book publishing interest Maxwell Macmillan Pergamon and last year began stalking the Australian magazine market with "an unlimited amount of money".

But his much-vaunted ambition of a few years ago – to build a media and communications empire which would be comparable to one of the seven major multinational companies which dominate the world oil market – foundered on an excess of appetite.

Although Mr Maxwell often argued that his global strategy was equity-led, not debt-led like Rupert Murdoch's, it all amounted to the same thing once the share price of Maxwell Communications Corporation began to slide last year.

In addition to his wife, Betty, Maxwell is survived by his sons, Kevin, Ian and Philip, and his daughters, Ghislaine, Anne, Christine and Isabel. Five of his children worked for him.

The Guardian, Australian Associated Press

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Mystery death of Jan Hoch

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that the accusations against both him and Mr Davies were ludicrous and that libel actions would be vigorously pursued.

Mr Hersh said last night that he had printed only a tiny proportion of the allegations against Mr Maxwell. He added that he now intended to make the information public.

"I think the real story about Mr Maxwell is going to be the stuff of newspapers and thrillers for years. He's an amazing piece of work," Mr Hersh said. "I know much more than I wrote about him."

Mr Maxwell gave no hint of any distress in telephone conversations with his employees, associates and family members a few hours before he disappeared, according to a company official.

Mr Charles Wilson, editorial director of Mirror Group Newspapers, said last night that there was no sign of foul play or anything unusual on the yacht, and ruled out suicide.

"We can only assume that Mr Maxwell slipped and fell overboard," he said.

But it may have been Mr Maxwell's secret penchant for late-night swimming which finally brought him undone.

His principal investment banker, Mr Robert Pirie, last night told of how his friend would go swimming all the time without telling anybody.

"He would just go down the ramp and take a swim and it used to scare the hell out of his crew."

Born in Czechoslovakia in 1923 to a poor Jewish farming family, Mr Maxwell escaped the Nazi occupation and immigrated to Britain in 1940. He spoke nine languages and was a highly decorated World War II veteran.

At the time of his death, he was one of Britain's wealthiest men, with a net worth estimated last year at $A2 billion and a worldwide media empire.

Despite his enormous wealth, Mr Maxwell described himself as an "instinctive socialist" and served as a Labour Party member of parliament from 1964 to 1970.

He was also a tough boss, feared more than loved. He once sacked his son Ian for failing to meet him at the airport, although he later reinstated him.

But Mr Maxwell could never understand why Britain would never take him to his heart. He remained, until his death, an outsider.

He could never, for instance, quite get the hang of the British class system. One day he was in the office of the *Mirror* editor, Roy Greenslade, when a telephone call came through from a peer of the realm. Mr Maxwell had never met the man before, but he hoped he'd help him put together some TV deal or other. "What's the man's name?" Mr Maxwell said to Mr Greenslade. "Er, Lord Farnsbarns," said the editor. "No – his full name."

While Lord Farnsbarns waited at the other end of the line Mr Greenslade got down *Who's Who*, turned to F and eventually read out "Lord Charles de Vere Fortescue Llewellyn Farnsbarns of Fulchester."

"Right," said Mr Maxwell. He picked up the phone and said: "Hello! Charlie! How are things?"

Come to that, he never quite had his finger on the order of precedence internationally. When the *Daily Mirror* ran a photo in its first edition of Mr Maxwell shaking the hand of President Gorbachev he had the caption changed for the second edition.

The photo was the same but this time the caption read "President Gorbachev meets Robert Maxwell".

Politicians and colleagues in Britain rushed to pay him tribute last night, one MP describing him as "the Citizen Kane of his time".

The Prime Minister, Mr John Major, described Maxwell as "a great character who will be sadly missed" and Mr Neil Kinnock, the leader of the Labour Party, called him "a unique figure who attracted controversy, envy and loyalty in great measure throughout his rumbustious life".

The Israeli Prime Minister, Mr Yitzhak Shamir, mourned the loss of "a passionate friend of Israel".

His rival media tycoon, Mr Rupert Murdoch, paid tribute to Maxwell, an unsuccessful bidder for the Melbourne *Age* and *West Australian* newspapers, as a "remarkable man".

Yacht death baffles experts

LONDON, Wednesday: Among the biggest mysteries surrounding Robert Maxwell's disappearance is how he could have fallen undetected from the deck of a yacht as large and secure as the 55-metre Lady Ghislaine.

London yachting fraternity members are sceptical that anyone neither very ill nor drunk could have fallen overboard in the good weather prevailing two nights ago off the Tenerife coast. The Meteorological Office said the weather was fine, with a light easterly wind.

"It would be about as hard as falling off a cross-Channel ferry," said Mr Nick Baker, manager of the Mayfair Office of Camper & Nicholson, the international yacht agency which handles the chartering of Lady Ghislaine. "If there had been very rough weather, it would be possible to fall off, but pretty difficult. But under what conditions Mr Maxwell could drop off, I cannot imagine."

Lady Ghislaine, named after one of Mr Maxwell's daughters, is one of the largest and most luxurious privately owned yachts in the world. In Britain, only the royal yacht Britannia and businessman Gerald Ronson's My Gail III are larger.

It is surrounded by railings of waist to chest height "in all the relevant areas", Mr Baker said. If Mr Maxwell had gone for a walk in the early hours of the morning, there are at least three outside decks he could have chosen. None is particularly exposed.

At least two of the 13-man crew, most of whom, like the captain, are British, would have been on watch during the night. They may have been on the bridge, which only looks towards the bow, or in the crew's quarters. In both areas, however, there are video screens scanning the decks and obvious exit points from the yacht.

One of Mr Maxwell's favourite activities was swimming off the yacht's side, but he is most unlikely to have been doing that at the time of his disappearance, since the boat was moving too fast.

Mr Maxwell often used Lady Ghislaine for business purposes, such as his spectacular arrival in New York's East River earlier this year to seal his purchase of the New York *Daily News*.

The Independent

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